

QPX parasite shellfish

Human Health Risk

Ecological Risk L

Socioeconomic Risk L

QPX stands for “Quahog Parasite X”, meaning an unknown parasite. QPX kills quahog or hard clams and was first discovered in New Jersey in Barnegat Bay in the 1970s. Infections with the QPX parasite may be associated with conditions that are stressful to the clams, such as low temperatures and densely populated beds.

What’s at risk?

Hard clam populations in Barnegat Bay Estuary (and possibly other estuaries) are at risk.

What are the ecological impacts in New Jersey?

New Jersey surveys have detected the presence of QPX in association with clam mortality in 1996 and 1997. The impact of these infections on New Jersey ecosystems has thus far been minimal, but infections may become increasingly severe with time. There is little known about the relationships among the QPX parasite, environmental conditions, and mortality rates in hard clam populations.

What are the socioeconomic impacts in New Jersey?

Quahog harvesting contributes about \$7.6 million and about 250 jobs to the New Jersey economy. Since 1978 there has been a general upward trend in quahog harvests, so there has not yet been a demonstrable impact as a result of QPX infection. Should quahog harvests begin to decline in the future, the relatively small size of the industry limits the potential for more than a negligible impact on the New Jersey economy.

What’s being done?

QPX itself is not regulated, but the National Shellfish Sanitation Program classifies shellfish harvesting beds according to the presence of potential sources of contamination. Good husbandry should minimize the potential for problems, and based on the historical trend, the threat of major impacts from QPX is unlikely.